

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1587
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ATHENS 6604

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, GR
SUBJECT: THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO CARAMANLIS

1. GREEK PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS IS SAID TO HAVE A FIERY
TEMPERAMENT WHEN CONFRONTED BY STIFF OPPOSITION. IF SO, HIS
PATIENCE SHOULD SELDOM BE TESTED BY HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS.
MANY POLITICIANS WOULD ENVY THE GREEK PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION:
HIMSELF POPULAR IN THE COUNTRY, HE FACES AN OPPOSITION THAT IS EN-
EFFECTIVE, DIVIDED AND ERRATIC. CARAMANLIS HARDLY HAS TO SHOVE
TO KEEP HIS OPPONENTS OFF BALANCE.

2. THIS IS A TIME WHEN UNHAPPINESS AMONG GREEK VOTERS IS
FOCUSED ON CONCERNS SUCH AS INFLATION AND TAXES, INADEQUATE
GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND A FRUSTRATING AND IMMOBILE BUREAUCRACY.
BUT THE OPPOSITION HAS FAILED TO COME UP WITH THE MAN OR
TO SEIZE UPON THE ISSUES TO CAPTURE THE DISAFFECTED. INSTEAD,
WHILE CARAMANLIS HAS SUCCEEDED IN MAINTAINING HIS OWN PRESTIGE
AS WELL AS KEEPING HIS NEW DEMOCRACY PARTY IN ONE PIECE,
HIS OPPOSITION HAS SUFFERED SCHISMS. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE
OPPOSITION HAS NOT YET BEGUN PLAUSIBLY TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, "AFTER
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CARAMANLIS WHAT?"

3. GEORGE MAVROS AND HIS UNION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CENTER (UDC)
ARE STRUGGLING MANFULLY -- AND NOT VERY SUCCESSFULLY-- WITH THE
TASK OF CREATING A VIABLE OPPOSITION TO THE PRIME MINISTER. MANY
YEARS AGO MEMBERS OF THE CENTER UNION USED TO DESCRIBE THEMSELVES
AS BELONGING TO "THE CENTER -- THE DEAD CENTER." BUT THOUGHTFUL

UDC MEMBERS DON'T LAUGH AT THEMSELVES MUCH THESE DAYS. THEY DO WORRY. WHILE THE UDC IS REORGANIZING ITSELF INTERNALLY IN AN EFFORT TO BOLSTER ITS VOTER APPEAL, NEVERTHELESS ITS ELECTORAL STRENGTH IS PROBABLY STAGNATING--IF NOT DROPPING BELOW THE 20 PERCENT IT RECEIVED IN THE 1974 ELECTIONS.

4. IT IS EASY ENOUGH TO ATTRIBUTE THE PARTY'S LACK OF MAGNETISM TO GEORGE MAVROS -- FOR LIKE EVERY PARTY IN GREECE THE UDC REFLECTS THE PERSONALITY OF ITS LEADER. AND NEARLY EVERYBODY HERE DOES POINT HIS FINGER AT THE LACKLUSTER MAVROS. FACED WITH THE UNENVIABLE TASK OF OPPOSING A GOVERNMENT WHOSE POLICIES HE GENERALLY AGREES WITH -- AND INTENT ON MAINTAINING THE POSSIBILITY OF EVENTUALLY LEADING THE UDC INTO A GRAND COALITION WITH CARAMANLIS -- MAVROS HAS ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS LEADER OF THE "LOYAL OPPOSITION." BUT FEW APPRECIATE THAT ACHIEVEMENT, AND MAVROS HAS REMAINED AS UDC LEADER LARGELY BECAUSE NONE OF HIS FOLLOWERS AND SUPPORTERS CAN THINK OF AN ALTERNATIVE WHO COULD KEEP THE UDC UNITED. THE CENTER'S DILEMMA IS, IRONICALLY, "AFTER MAVROS WHAT?"

5. ANDREAS PAPANDREOU, LEADER OF THE PANHELLENIC SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (PASOK), IS APPARENTLY CONVINCED THAT HE WILL BE THERE TO LIGHT THE WAY FOR GREECE AFTER CARAMANLIS. EVERYTHING ABOUT HIS TACTICS AND STRATEGY SEEMS TO CONFIRM THAT PAPANDREOU HAS HIS EYE NOT ON THE NEXT GREEK ELECTIONS, BUT BEYOND TO THE TIME WHEN CARAMANLIS, MAVROS, AND THOSE OF THEIR GENERATION

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LEAVE THE POLITICAL ARENA. IN PURSUIT OF THIS LONGER TERM DESIGN, HE HAS NOT BEEN CONSTRAINED BY LOYALTY TO THE SYSTEM OR TO THE GOVERNMENT. INSTEAD, HE HAS CONSISTENTLY STAKED OUT FOR HIMSELF POSITIONS ON ONE POLE (FAR LEFT) OF THE SPECTRUM. HIS VERBAL FIREWORKS, HIS MAGNETIC PERSONALITY, AND HIS CONSIDERABLE ENERGIES HAVE, BY MOST ACCOUNTS, SUCCEEDED IN IMPRESSING ON HIS FELLOW GREEKS THE IDEA THAT IF THERE IS A GENUINE NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION IN GREECE, HE IS LEADING IT.

6. THERE IS MUCH LESS AGREEMENT ON WHETHER PAPANDREOU HAS MANAGED TO GATHER MANY VOTERS IN THE PROCESS. MANY FEEL THAT HIS ERRATIC BEHAVIOR AND HIS VERBAL PYROTECHNICS HAVE SO IDENTIFIED HIM WITH IRRESPONSIBILITY AND WITH THE EXTREME LEFT THAT ELECTORAL SUPPORT FOR PASOK MAY EVEN HAVE DROPPED OFF FROM THE 13 PERCENT IT POLLED IN 1974. AND AS A COROLLARY OF THAT ARGUMENT, ONE PERSISTENT RUMOR IS THAT PAPANDREOU WILL SHORTLY TAKE IN HIS RHETORICAL SAILS AND TACK TOWARDS MODERATE GREEK POLITICAL OPINION. PAPANDREOU IS CAPABLE OF SUCH A MOVE. FOR EXAMPLE, MANY READ HIS DECLARATION LAST MAY TO A TURKISH PAPER THAT HE WOULD CONSIDER "JOINT EXPLOITATION" BY GREECE AND TURKEY IN THE AEGEAN IF TURKEY RECOGNIZED "GREEK SOVEREIGNTY" AS A STEP IN THIS MODERATING PROCESS.

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7. HOWEVER, THOUGH HIS STATEMENTS BEFORE AND DURING THE JULY 9-11 PASOK CONGRESS MAY HAVE BEEN SLIGHTLY LESS FLAMBOYANT, NOTHING HE HAS SAID TO DATE MARKS ANY CLEAR CHANGE IN HIS POLITICAL COURSE. AT THE CONGRESS HE REJECTED ANY ALLIANCE WITH OTHER PARTIES IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS, A SEEMING REAFFIRMATION OF HIS DETERMINATION TO REMAIN CLEARLY AND ABSOLUTELY "THE OPPOSITIONIST".

(THE PASOK CONGRESS, A RATHER LACKLUSTER AFFAIR, PASS A SERIES OF RESOLUTIONS REPEATING WELL-KNOWN PASOK POSITIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE PARTY REPEATED ITS DEMAND THAT THE GOV SUSPEND ALL NEGOTIATIONS WITH TURKEY OVER THE AEGEAN AND ANNOUNCE THAT IT WOULD NOT SACRIFICE GREEK SOVEREIGN RIGHTS GUARANTEED IN THE 1958 GENEVA CONVENTION; IT AGAIN ASKED THAT THE LONG-DELAYED TRIAL OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR CYPRUS BEGIN. INTERESTINGLY, THE CONGRESS DID NOT ADDRESS MOTIONS TO SUCH ISSUES AS GREEK ENTRY INTO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, RELATIONS WITH NATO, OR GREEK-US RELATIONS -- ON ALL OF WHICH PASOK HAS BEEN VOCAL AND NEGATIVE IN THE PAST.)

8. BEYOND THE UDC AND PASOK ARE THE SMALLER FRY: THE PARTIES OF THE LEFT AND THE FAR LEFT. OF THESE, ONLY THE COMMUNIST

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PARTY OF THE EXTERIOR (KKE-EXTERIOR), MOSCOW'S LOYAL FRIEND, IS IN SOUND SHAPE. ALONE AMONG THE SMALL PARTIES, THE KKE-EXTERIOR CAN BE CONFIDENT BOTH OF ITS FINANCES AND OF ELECTING SEVERAL DEPUTIES IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS. LIKE PASOK, THE KKE-EXTERIOR IS A LEADING FORCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND IS REPORTEDLY GAINING STRENGTH AMONG CERTAIN LABOR UNIONS. YET IT IS STILL FAR FROM ACHIEVING A POSITION OF SUBSTANTIAL INFLUENCE HERE. IT REMAINS AN OUTSIDER IN A SOCIETY OF INSIDERS; HANDICAPPED SEVERELY BY HAVING LOST THE CIVIL WAR, AND INTIMIDATED BY THE THOUGHT IT MAY BE RETURNED TO THE ILLEGALITY FROM WHICH IT HAS SO LATELY EMERGED IF IT OVER-REACHES ITSELF.

9. THE OTHER SMALL LEFTIST PARTIES, SUCH AS THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC LEFT (EDA), ARE LOOKING PRESENTLY TO A SOMBER FUTURE. UNDER THE ELECTORAL LAW THEIR CHANCES OF ELECTING ANYBODY TO PARLIAMENT ARE SLIM UNLESS THEY UNITE. IN PRINCIPLE, THEY ARE ALL FOR UNITY. IN PRACTICE THEY MUST WRESTLE WITH COMPETING EGOS AND SUCH SENSITIVE ISSUES AS WHETHER OR NOT TO INCLUDE IN SUCH AN ALLIANCE THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE INTERIOR, THE LOCAL VERSION OF EUROCOMMUNISM. THE THOUGHT OF POLITICAL EXTINCTION AT THE POLLS IS CERTAINLY SOBERING, BUT THE ROAD TO ANY EFFECTIVE ELECTORAL UNITY WILL BE A HARD ONE. IN THE MEANTIME, THESE ORGANIZATIONS MUCH WRESTLE WITH SHORTAGES OF FUNDS AND LACK OF PUBLIC ATTENTION TO THEIR ACTIVITIES.

10. IT IS EASY TO SEE THE WEAKNESS OF CARAMANLIS' OPPOSITION. LESS OBVIOUS ARE THE REASONS THE PRIME MINISTER MUST TAKE IT INTO ACCOUNT IN HIS MOST IMPORTANT DECISION MAKING: IN CONTEMPORARY GREECE, MATTERS OF FOREIGN POLICY OFFER THE GREATEST POTENTIAL FOR DEVISIVE CONFRONTATION. AMONG THE MORE SPECIFIC ISSUES ARE GREECE'S RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES, WITH NATO AND WITH TURKEY. THESE FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES ARE EASILY AND UNUSUALLY CAST IN ONE DIMENSIONAL, EMOTIONAL TERMS HERE.

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THUS, WE CAN EXPECT THE PRIME MINISTER TO MANUEVER CAUTIOUSLY AND CAREFULLY WHEN DEALING WITH FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES TO AVOID PROVIDING HIS FRUSTRATED OPPOSITION WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO STRIKE.

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